

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2016

Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-0203

Re: BOEM Wind Energy Development off Coastal North Carolina

Chairman Murkowski:

We are writing to request your consideration of including specific language to the FY 2017 Interior appropriations bill with respect to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) development of wind energy along the Atlantic coast, including off coastal North Carolina.

As you may be aware, BOEM has identified three wind energy areas (WEAs) off coastal North Carolina. The Kitty Hawk WEA is located no closer than 24 nautical miles (nm) from shore and no closer than 33.7 nm from the closest historic lighthouse, Bodie Island Lighthouse. In contrast, the Wilmington West and Wilmington East WEAs will be located only about 10–15 nm and 15 nm miles from shore, and only slightly farther from the Bald Head Island Lighthouse, "Old Baldy," which is the oldest freestanding lighthouse in North Carolina and located adjacent to Bald Head Island's shore.

Coastal North Carolina is a major tourist destination in our State, bringing significant revenue to our local communities every year. Tourists from all over the country flock to visit our pristine beaches. Additionally, these visitors come to our coast to enjoy our beautiful view-sheds, our starry night skies, and of course, our historic lighthouses. Therefore, we are extremely concerned about the impact that the location of wind energy turbines may have on our coastal communities.

These local worries are identical to federal concerns raised by the National Park Service (NPS). In previously submitted comments to BOEM, NPS raised concerns about the impact of the turbines on the view-sheds from national park lands, specifically the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Wright Brothers National Memorial. The NPS was concerned that visitors who are drawn to the national parks in coastal North Carolina because of their unobstructed views, starry night skies, and historic lighthouses, among other attractions, would be put off by seeing wind turbines from shore. Eventually, the Kitty Hawk WEA was established at a distance of 24 nm from shore with a 33.7 nm buffer from Bodie Island Lighthouse. However, prior to that determination, NPS noted:

*Specifically, the NPS requests that OCS blocks within 26 nautical miles (nm) of these two national seashores be excluded from the designation of the Wind Energy Area (WEA) and from leasing to protect scenic ocean views. This request is based on the results of the wind simulation study and the theoretical limit of offshore visibility of 26 nm for a 400 foot high wind turbine presented in the 2007 Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the Minerals Management Service on Alternative Energy Development on the OCS. That distance may need to be greater for larger wind turbines if they are visible from the two national seashores (March 7, 2013, BOEM-2012-0088 & BOEM-2012-0090).*

We believe that BOEM should extend the same buffer zone for the local coastal communities in North Carolina as the Bureau provided to its sister agency, the National Park Service. A variety of our local coastal communities agree and have passed resolutions ensuring that wind turbines are not constructed within 24nm from shore. These communities include: the Village of Bald Head Island; the Town of Kure Beach; the Town of Caswell Beach; the Town of Ocean Isle Beach; and the Town of Sunset Beach. Additionally, the Old Baldy Foundation, Inc., the organization responsible for maintaining the 198 year old lighthouse on Bald Head Island, has also adopted a resolution requesting that BOEM restrict leasing off coastal North Carolina by identifying and excluding locations where wind turbines would be visible from Old Baldy.

Additionally, a 2013 North Carolina State University study<sup>1</sup> found that the presence of visible offshore wind turbine generators will cause a major reduction in vacationers willing to rent homes in coastal North Carolina. The study predicts a local reduction in tourism of 55 percent.

Therefore, we have drafted the below legislative language that we respectfully request you consider for inclusion in the Interior appropriations bill. The language applies only to North Carolina and would ensure that BOEM would not be able to allow for leases that allow for turbines to be located closer than 24 nm from shore.

***Bureau of Ocean Energy Management – None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to offer wind leases offshore within 24 nautical miles of the State of North Carolina shoreline.***

We have provided the following report language for your review as well:

***Offshore Wind Energy Development.—North Carolina beaches and historic lighthouses attract tourists from all over the world, and any hindrance of the view-shed from shore could greatly impact tourist revenue to the state and local economy. Consequently, the Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management shall not issue wind leases offshore that would allow wind turbines to be constructed or located less than 24 nautical miles from the State of North Carolina shoreline.***

We greatly appreciate your consideration in this matter and are happy to discuss this issue further at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Richard Burr  
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>1</sup> Lutzeyer, Sanja. *Essays in Offshore Wind Energy Development* (NC State U. Ph.D. dissertation under the direction of Dr. Laura O. Taylor) (2013).